

Why the Loose Rein?

By Ty Evans



Ellie Evans offering a loose rein while jumping deadfall with her mule Tina.

Photo by Skye Evans

These days it is very common to get folks from an English riding background in my clinics. One of the first questions they have is about the loose rein. These folks are used to having contact with those reins down to the bit and it is really unnatural for them to ride with a loose rein, a concept I teach in all my clinics and schools.

Now, I am not writing this article to argue with anyone about what is right or wrong, nor am I trying to belittle anyone who rides in these disciplines, but rather I am writing to explain where I am coming from and what my personal mulemanship goals are. When I pick up on that rein and contact occurs between myself and the

mule, I want that feel to have meaning. I want there to be a response from the mule back to me, then from myself back to the mule. One of my goals is to preserve that feel in the mule's mouth. I want the mule to remain as sensitive as possible on the lips, bars, and tongue. Often, with consistent contact from the rider, the mule's mouth will become dull and braced.

Another of my goals is to have the mule operating primarily off my seat and legs. In my clinics I tell my students, "Whenever you have the temptation to pull harder on the rein, check your legs, they probably aren't doing their job." The interesting thing about striving to use your rein less is that your rein remains sensitive to

the mule. I want my mules to be responsive to the neck rein to some degree but just like too much contact with the mule's mouth we can have too much contact with the neck of the mule as well. Using my legs more and my rein less really helps to balance the mule more, support and direct movement more precisely and offer a more accurate signal. Offering the mule, a loose rein allows for the mule to use their head properly for better balance. Another thing I would like to add here is that it has been my observation that folks who use the rein a lot for contact seem to use their seat and core less accurately, if at all. Our seat and core do so much to communicate with our mules and it is important that you use those parts of your body when you ride. When we do so much pulling and dragging with the rein or when we hang on that rein with constant pressure, we distance ourselves from feeling the mule with our seat and core and furthermore we often brace ourselves against the seat while pulling on those reins.

It is important to note here that I obviously am not against picking up on a rein to communicate with my mule. I also need to note that I am not adversely against pulling hard on a rein when that type of signal is needed. What I am trying to communicate to the reader is that it is in the loose rein that the mule should find the relief and the reward. I have told many of my students that I care less about how hard they pull, and more about how fast they can release and offer a loose rein in the quickest manner possible. I would like to be

able to set my reins down on the saddle horn and be able to easily and accurately guide and direct my mule.

In my culture, that of the Great Basin Buckaroo, we pride ourselves on being able to ride a fine mule or horse on a loose rein while getting a

job done well. This is the horsemanship and mulemanship we strive for and highly respect. Thanks for taking the time to read, I hope to see you at a clinic sometime soon. God bless.

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MULE THOUGHTS...

Some Valentine Advice...

**Never kiss your Mule
when your nose is runny,
you may think it's funny
but it's Snot!**

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